

Chores for Children

“Housework at Your House” was a hot topic on the Hampton Roads Show last Monday. They chatted about divvying up chores with your spouse, but what about getting your children to help keep the house clean? Why is it important to get our kids to help with the housework?

We should parent with the end in mind. If we want our children to be independent, responsible, self-sufficient adults one day, then we need to train them now by gradually giving them responsibility as they grow and mature. When we first become parents we start out doing everything for our children because they're babies and can't do for themselves, but as they age some of us never stop doing everything for them, then wonder why our teenagers leave the house not knowing how to take care of themselves. It's also important that children do their part around the house so they understand that the family is a team and every member needs to do their part to keep the house functioning.

Parents should involve their children in the daily chores in the home. Look at everything you do for your children and figure out what they can start doing for themselves. Don't expect it to be done the way you do it right away (or ever!), but show them how to put toys away after they play, how to put their clothes in the hamper at the end of the day, or take their own dishes to the sink. There's a process to many things that are done around the house and parents need to teach that to their kids.

We would never expect a child to just pick up a book and know how to read. There are many steps and it takes a lot of practice before a child can read without help. Some of the things done around the house, like laundry or cleaning the bathroom, are the same way. Break down the steps and teach them to your children one-by-one over time until they've learned the entire job. Of course, graduating to the next step may depend on their age. Kids under 8 shouldn't use bathroom chemicals, so give them age-appropriate things to do, like clearing off the counter, replacing the towels and emptying the trash. But don't neglect to move them forward when they're ready. As parents, it's our job to prepare and empower our children. It may take some time, but your child will eventually learn how to be self-sufficient with your help.

If you find yourself nagging to get your kids to help with the chores, try to stop because it isn't working. Call a family meeting and talk about what you expect them to do and when. Make sure they know what you mean by “clean your room” – that's so vague. Let them know what that means to you: Hanging up clothes, putting shoes in the closet, making the bed, be specific. Young children can make a chore chart using pictures or words and older kids can type a list on the computer. It's important to involve them in the discussion, list what each family member does around the house, so they can see where they fall short or where someone else needs help. You can even have them sign a contract. Then when you see something that needs to be done, refer back to the chart or contract and let them know calmly that they won't be able to enjoy certain privileges until it gets done. Then walk away. It's their choice to comply or not, but you should have consequences set in place if they don't and you need to follow through with them!

We teach our children how to treat us and, ultimately, others. We don't want our children treating us or anyone else like their maid and we don't want them leaving home not knowing how to take care of themselves. There's no doubt that kids helping out around the house is a win for parents, but kids may not appreciate why it's a win for them right now. Doing chores builds character by showing kids the value of work. You may not see the fruits of your labor with parenting immediately, but just remain steadfast and consistent with your teachings and one day you will.